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FROM USMISSION UNESCO

STATE FOR IO/UNESCO JANE COWLEY, OES/STAS ANDREW W. REYNOLDS, OES BARRIE RIPIN, OES ANTOINETTE CONDO  
STATE FOR USAID NORMAN RIFKIN  
STATE FOR NSC GENE WHITNEY  
STATE FOR NASA ELIZABETH WILLIAMS, RON BIRK

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: MEETING OF MAN AND BIOSPHERE (MAB) PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR FRESH STRATEGY, INCREASED STRESS ON HYDROLOGY AND RESEARCH

1. Summary and introduction: the agenda of the June 27-29 meeting of the bureau of the international coordinating council of the man and biosphere (MAB) program focused on management of biosphere reserves, including those that are also world heritage sites. Under MAB's current short-term strategy, minimal change in programs is expected, except in response to budgetary limitations. MAB leadership is readying the development of the next medium term strategy, to involve interdisciplinary initiatives (especially with water sciences), increased research, and review of existing sites. The consensus is that the program needs updating and reinvigorating. End summary and introduction.

MAB meeting stresses future links with water sciences

2. In his opening remarks to the MAB bureau council meeting, Andras Szollosi-Nagy (executive secretary of unesco's international hydrological program) called for closer interaction between UNESCO programs in water - the principal priority of the science sector - and earth and ecological sciences. Szollosi-Nagy noted plans for a meeting in Mexico in 2006 to discuss coordination strategies for Ramsar, world heritage and biosphere reserves with respect to hydrological research programs. In his remarks, earth sciences division director Natarajan Ishwaran emphasized the need for closer coordination of hydrological issues at biosphere reserves. MAB should promote a proactive approach to biosphere reserve management, allowing for economic development while safeguarding the environment. As an example, Ishwaran cited a proposed eco-hydrology center in Poland, a potential model for similar centers in Argentina and Indonesia. Both Szollosi-Nagy and Ishwaran advocated increased MAB focus on research.

MAB seeks strategy for site review, data collection

3. Evoking MAB's future thematic focus, Ishwaran indicated that the program would primarily focus its work on biodiversity, climate change and sustainability-related activities in response to the millennium ecosystem assessment findings.

4. Operationally, the MAB bureau added 23 new biosphere reserves - to the nearly 500 existing sites -- including one transboundary reserve with a world heritage site, the Senegal river delta (includes the Djoudj). The secretariat stressed the importance of periodic 10-year reviews of existing reserves, advocating a consistent review strategy based on a set of pertinent indicators; new baseline data would be required. Such a strategy would entail partnerships with space agencies; it would dovetail well with an increased emphasis on research at biosphere sites. Also discussed was the archipelago reserve concept, proposed by Mexico as a means of addressing problems of managing a fragmented protected area; participants requested further study of this idea.

5. The MAB bureau meeting was also a chance to review progress. Regional council members presented updates on MAB regional projects, all of which highlighted multi-disciplinary networking between bio scientists and policy makers. During the past year, the MAB program has organized regional conferences and workshops on biodiversity in marine/coastal, transboundary, urban, dryland ecosystems and tropical forests. Ishwaran highlighted capacity building efforts, activities that he said need to be expanded.

16. Comment. We will continue to monitor this sensitive program and provide periodic reports.